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JEWISH RELIGION IN THE FIFTH CENTURY B.C.

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The Old Testament in its present form is the product of repeated revisions. These revisions involved modification, adaptation, and elimination of previously existing material. This sort of thing was indispensable, if the Old Testament was to preserve its usefulness from age to age as an aid to the constantly changing and developing religious consciousness of the times. The Old Testament literature had to be kept alive, if it were to continue to minister to successive generations of Hebrews. The teachings and rites that had satisfied the ninth century B.C. could not meet the needs of the third century, except as they had kept pace with the progress of the intervening centuries by constant change and enrichment.

We find abundant evidence of certain aspects of the foregoing process in the Old Testament literature as we now have it. Perhaps the outstanding illustration is furnished by the Books of Chronicles in comparison with the Books of Kings. A scarcely less clear example is found in the development of the Hexateuch. Another proof exists in the editorial supplements to such prophetic books as Amos, Micah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. But in all this class of editorial revisions it is clear that the old materials were allowed to stand, either in their original form or in a modified form, because they did not vary so widely from the later viewpoint as to shock the religious consciousness of the day. That there were in the earlier forms of the literature elements which would have been obnoxious to later generations and were therefore eliminated from time to time in successive revisions has long been recognized. Indeed, we get hints of such materials in the present text. The editors' work was not always carried through with consistency. They evidently at times "grew weary in well-doing," and allowed certain things to stand which, from their own point of view, they would have done well to remove. To the student of the history of Hebrew religion these survivals from earlier stages, now found imbedded like fossils in

later strata, have been of invaluable assistance. What rich suggestions as to early Hebrew thought come to us from stories like that of Moses' interview with Yahweh on the mountain top, when Yahweh vouchsafed him a view of his back, but would not let Moses see his face! Or take that similar story of Yahweh's attack upon Moses when he was on his way back to Egypt, at which time Moses' life was saved only by the resourcefulness of Zipporah in circumcising their boy and presenting the bloody token to Yahweh as an appeasement. In a different sphere of thought, what can we think of the morals of an age that could without any difficulty represent Yahweh as inspiring David to take a census of all Israel, and thereupon punishing David through his subjects for having done as he was inspired to do? Could we but have the earlier editions of the Old Testament books preserved alongside of their revisions, what a revelation of progress would stand on record!

Herein lies a great part of the value of the papyri from Elephantine. They are a group of documents which have escaped the editors' hands. They lie before us, in so far as they have escaped the ravages of time and circumstance, exactly as they left the hands of their writers. For the most part, of course, they were private or semiprivate records; hence, not coming within the circle of official and more particularly religious documents, they have been allowed to continue telling their original tale. Furthermore, their value is enhanced by reason of the fact that they carry with them the indisputable evidence of the time of their origin. In many cases they state explicitly the year and month of their composition; and in other cases, where the date is not thus given, the documents show by the names used and the situation revealed that they belong to the same period as the dated records. The period covered by the papyri extends from 484 B.C. to about 400 B.C. For this period they constitute a source of information of unrivaled significance. One of the greatest difficulties confronting the student of the post-exilic age has been the fact that so little of the post-exilic literature can be definitely dated. In these papyri we have at least one chronological milestone.

Before we can safely use this body of sources as truly revealing the nature and content of Jewish religious thought in general we

must ask ourselves whether or not this colony may be regarded as truly representative of the Jewish religious theory and practice of the fifth century B.C. I myself for some time after the publication of the papyri thought otherwise. The line of reasoning then followed was to the effect that founders of the colony had left Judah at least as early as about 600 B.C. They had carried with them the religious standards and practices of the day. They were for the most part common folk and represented the religion of the masses rather than that of the religiously élite. Settled on the upper reaches of the Nile, they were effectually separated from Judah and Judaic influences and lived their religious life unto themselves. They were consequently untouched by the changes in Jerusalem and went on perpetuating the practices and conceptions of the seventh century.

Further reflection, however, shows that conception of the situation to be in part mistaken. There was no such chasm between the Jews of Jerusalem and those of Assuan as this would involve. Traffic between Assuan and Palestine was not broken off. The probability is that it was rather intensified after the establishment of the Jewish garrison at Assuan. The facts in the case are well stated by Stanley A. Cook,¹ as follows:

The papyri themselves bear witness to the extent of intercourse. The fragments of the Behistun inscription of Darius would indicate that copies were sent around, or at least that there were people evidently interested enough to desire a copy. The so-called Passover papyrus, and the correspondence between Elephantine and the priests of Jerusalem, the governor of Judah, and Sanballat, are evidence of interrelations which, to judge from the various biblical references to Egypt, were not confined to any one age. . . . Moreover, the jar handles from Phoenicia indicate communications between Upper Egypt and the Levant. Consequently we are not entitled to regard the Jewish colony as some secluded, parochial community, living a sequestered life, retaining such religious conceptions as the early founders had brought with them, and untouched by, if not ignorant of, events in the world outside.

To these considerations, urged by Cook, we may add another, pointing in the direction of a somewhat close relationship between the colony at Assuan and the home folks. The colonists at once turn for aid in the time of their misfortune to the mother-country. A

¹ "The Significance of the Elephantine Papyri for the History of Hebrew Religion," *American Journal of Theology*, XIX, 366 f.

letter was sent to Bagohi, governor of Judah, to Jehohanan the high priest, and to his fellow-priests in Jerusalem, and to the nobles of Judah. This certainly looks as though they fully counted upon the sympathy and support of the authorities in Judah, both political and religious. They also knew the names of the chief officials and their family relationships. Their knowledge is too definite and intimate to permit the possibility of their having been in any way isolated from the Palestinian Jews. Nor is it likely that there was any lively consciousness of a serious difference in religious and theological standpoint between the Assuan and the Jerusalem communities. It is true that the Jerusalem authorities did not reply to the request of the Jewish garrison at Assuan. But this silence is susceptible of more than one interpretation. It need not be taken as indicative of disapproval. It is possible, indeed, that the Assuan letter never reached its destination—the mail service of the period was not error-proof. Or there may have been economic or diplomatic reasons which forbade a response to the cry of need. Incidentally, the fact that the exiles turned to the authorities of Samaria does not imply any knowledge on their part of a schism between Jerusalem and Samaria. Had they been aware of any such hostility they would hardly have prejudiced their case with the Samaritan authorities by telling them that in the first instance they had sought aid in Jerusalem, and had turned to Samaria only after having failed in the former place. This whole situation rather points to the conclusion that the schism between Jerusalem and Samaria had not yet come about. And this conclusion is in harmony with the statement of Josephus that the temple on Gerizim was not built until the days of Alexander the Great.

All this suggests that religious conditions in Jerusalem, Assuan, and Samaria were on very much the same level. In further support of this proposition may be cited the papyrus dealing with the Feast of Maṣṣoth. This papyrus evidently contains a decree of the Persian government fixing the date of the celebration of the Feast. It is hardly likely that that decree was formulated exclusively for the Assuan community. It seems rather that it emanated from the Babylonian Jews who inspired the government to the issuance of the decree, and that it was meant for the entire Jewish world. If,

now, such matters as the celebration of religious feasts came within the purview of the Persian government, it is clear that that government controlled the religion of the Jews in a somewhat detailed fashion; and that argues for a certain uniformity of Jewish religious practice throughout the whole extent of the Exile. To be sure, the government did not and could not control the utterances of the great prophetic spirits of Jewry; but the institutional religion was under its sway, and that religion is always the religion of the masses. We may then turn to the religion of the colony at Elephantine and realize that the kind of religious life revealed by these papyri was, to all intents and purposes, the religion of the Jewish common people everywhere in the fifth century B.C.

It will not be possible here to set forth the entire religious situation revealed in the papyri. Let us satisfy ourselves, therefore, with a brief examination of the God-idea of the Egyptian Jews. We are straightway confronted by the fact that the letters of the exiles, in calling down the divine blessing upon those to whom they write, at times employ the plural form of the designation for deity, viz., אֱלֹהִים (e.g., Sachau 6:1; 12:1; 14:1; 44:1, etc.). That this is a real plural and not a mere *pluralis majestaticus* is shown by the use of the plural form of the verb which often accompanies the term for deity (e.g., 10:2; 12:1; 14:1; 44:1). Following along this trail, we next discover that the Assuan Jews did not hesitate to take oath by deities other than Yahweh. Mibtahyah, a Jewess, as her name shows, in a suit with an Egyptian, takes oath in court by the Egyptian goddess Satis (Cowley, Pap. F). Another Jew, Menaḥem bar Shallum, in a suit over a donkey, swears by Mesgid and by Anath-Yahu. These cases, however, do not carry us far, since foreigners and foreign courts are involved and such oaths were probably obligatory. More significant is the fact of the occurrence of personal names compounded with divine names other than Yahu. There are the following compounds with Nabu (Nebo), viz.: אֲדִנְנָבּוּ (60:1, 2), נָבּוּ (72:15), נְבוּכַדְרֶצַּר (34:2, etc.), נְבוּנָךְ (24, Rev. 1), נְבוּנָתָךְ (36, Obv. 3, Rev. 4, 5), נְבוּסַמְסַכָּן (14:1, etc.), נְבוּעַקָב (9:23, 28; 18 Rev. 1, 20; 56 Rev. 1, 2), and נְבַשְׁלֹר (25:8; cf. 21:2). The name Baal occurs in בַּעַלְעֶזֶר (69:5(?), 6), בַּעַלְעִיזֹר (69:13), and עַבְדִּבְעַל (69:10). The name of the Egyptian deity Chnum (or Chnub) appears in מְנַחֲחִנּוּם

24:5, תפחנזם 74:4, תחנזם 12:Obv. 2, 15:1, and 58, 7:3, and in עהמלקרת 20:9. Single occurrences are found of Melkarth (עמלקרת, 69:4), Eshmun (עבראשמן, 72:2), Resheph (עבררשה (?) 70:13), Amon (עבראמן, 69:8) and Sin (סנאבלט, 2:29). One man is known as Ḥeremnathan (17:2), son of Bethel-nathan, son of Zakko. The name Bethel occurs as a god-name also in Bethel-aqab (18:9), in Bethel-taqum (25:6, 10); perhaps also in Bethel-nûr ([בית]אלנור) in 18, col. 1:6 (cf. Hadad-nûri (חדדנורי) in 18, col. 2:4), and in Bethel-šezib.¹ That such names are good *Jewish* names is shown by the case of Bethel-nathan, son of Yahu-nathan (34:5). We are immediately reminded of Bethel-šarušur in Zech. 7:2, which shows that Bethel was a divine name in good standing in Palestine in 518 B.C. As has been pointed out more than once, such names as Bethel and Ḥerem do not necessarily indicate the recognition of other gods wholly independent of Yahu. The ancient practice was to swear by the god and by anything and everything associated with him. Hence oaths by the shrine or the sacred inclosure were common, and as a result the shrine-name came to achieve a sort of semidivine significance and to function alongside the god worshiped at the shrine as a kind of secondary deity. For all practical purposes, then, Bethel and Yahu and Ḥerem might be regarded as equivalents.

The most unsettling thing, however, in the papyri is a long list of gifts bearing this superscription: "These are the names of the Jewish force which gave money for Yahu the god, each man two shekels in money." But the summary in col. 7 of the list distributes the fund between Yahu and two other deities. These latter are Ašam-bethel and Anath-bethel. It may be noted also that Anath-bethel and Yahu receive practically equal portions. These deities are evidently companions of Yahu on the most intimate terms. Anath-bethel is almost certainly, in the light of what we have already said about Bethel, to be identified with Anath-Yahu, a deity who actually appears in another papyrus (32:3). We are at once reminded of the Ashtar-Chemosh of the Mesha-Inscription, the Atar-gatis of northern Syria (=the Atar of Ate), the Osiris-Isis of Egypt, the Cybele-Attis of Pessinus in Phrygia, and other similar composite deities. If, as seems safe, we may interpret the Bethel

¹ On an ostrakon from Elephantine published in *CIS* II, 1, Nr. 154, line 7.

of Ašam-bethel in the same way as=Yahu, we find Yahu provided, not only with his Anath, but also with his Ašam, or Ašimah. That Anath was not some Egyptian goddess with whom Yahu became entangled after leaving his Judean home is quite evident. She was rather quite at home on Palestinian soil, and was indeed Semitic rather than Egyptian. The name of Jeremiah's home village, Anathoth, attests her pre-exilic recognition in Israel, as does likewise the place-name Beth-anath. Cf. also the name **נַחֲתִי** in our papyri, 20, col. 6:8. In the same way the Ašam or Ašimah is probably to be found on Hebrew soil. In Amos 8:14 the prophet denounces "those who swear by the **אֲשֵׁמָה** of Samaria and say, 'As thy god liveth, O Dan.'" The suggestion was at once made upon the discovery of these papyri that the "guilt" of Samaria was originally the Ašimah of Samaria, who now appears at Elephantine as Yahweh's consort.

This recognition of other gods alongside of Yahweh was a bit surprising to the modern mind. But, upon second thought, it is exactly what we ought to have expected. Indeed, it is precisely what we actually find recorded of Israel both before and after the Exile. In the Mesha-stone from the eighth century B.C. the Moabite exults over the fact that he has overthrown the city of Ataroth belonging to the men of Gad, and "removed thence the altar-hearth of D W D H and dragged it before Kemosh." Later on in his record he tells us that he captured the city of Nebo from Israel and "took thence the altar of Yahweh and dragged it before Kemosh." It is plain that D W D H was a deity worshiped by the Gadites. Amos 8:14 again probably testifies to the worship of the same god at Beer-sheba, viz., "Who say, 'As lives thy god, O Dan' and 'As lives thy D W D , O Beersheba.'"

We recall with fresh understanding that Jeremiah declared, "According to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah" (Jer. 11:13), and begin to suspect that Jeremiah meant just what he said. We remember that the refugees from Judah are reported in Jer., chap. 44, as being resolutely determined to worship the "queen of heaven," and as convinced that all the nation's troubles were due to the fact that they had temporarily abandoned her worship. We realize that nearly all the pre-exilic prophets from Elijah down to

Jeremiah had denounced the worship by the Hebrews of other gods than Yahweh. Amos 5:26 is evidently a reference to the worship of alien gods, though in the present state of the text we are not quite sure of their names. The whole book of Hosea turns around the iniquity of Israel in sharing with the Baalim that allegiance which belonged to Yahweh only. Isa. 2:8 tells us that "their land is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made"; and a day is announced upon which "the idols shall utterly pass away" and be cast "to the moles and to the bats" (Isa. 2:18-20). Isa. 17:8 mentions the Asherim and sun-images as part of Israel's sin against Yahweh. Zephaniah too protests against the worship of alien gods and particularly resents the coupling of the names of other gods with that of Yahweh (1:2ff.).¹ Ezekiel likewise, speaking during the early part of the Exile, denounces the use of sun-images (6:4, 6) and speaks of idols in such a way as to show that he has in mind, not merely images of Yahweh, but rather the images of many gods (6:13). Again in chap. viii, he describes the corrupt worship in the temple itself as including "every form of creeping things and abominable beasts and all the idols of the house of Israel" (8:10) and women "weeping for Tammuz" (8:14) and men "worshiping the sun toward the East" (8:16). So desperately earnest was this worship of other gods that it involved the sacrifice of human beings as burnt offerings (20:31 f.; cf. Jer. 7:21). It is particularly significant that Ezekiel frankly recognizes that such things as these have been the *legitimate* usage in Israel—yea, carried on with the sanction of Yahweh, though for the purpose that he might be warranted in destroying his nation, viz., "I gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live, etc." (Ezek. 20:25).

Nor did the Exile, with the accompanying work of such great prophets as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the author of Isa., chaps. 40-55, bring about the purification of the Hebrews from idolatry. We find its practice attested even as late as the period from which the Elephantine papyri come. The prophecies in Isa., chaps. 56-66, belong in point of time in all probability to the period of Nehemiah.

¹ See my commentary on Zephaniah (*I.C.C.*), pp. 187-90.

They furnish abundant evidence of the existence of non-Yahwistic practices. In Isa. 57:5 ff. we read:

Are ye not children of apostacy a lying seed,
Who inflame yourselves among the oaks, under every green tree,
Who slay the children in the valleys, under the cleft of the rocks?
The flints of the valley are thy portion; they, they are thy lot.
Even to them hast thou poured a drink-offering, thou hast offered a meal offering.
Can I be appeased for such things?

And the passage continues in such a way as to show clearly that Israel has "gone far away" from Yahweh and has entered into covenant relationships with other gods, even carrying "oil to Melek" (57:9).

In Isa. 65:2 ff. the prophet, speaking in Yahweh's name, says:

I have spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people,
Who walk in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts;
The people who vex me to my face continually,
Sacrificing in gardens, and burning incense upon bricks;
Who sit in the graves and lodge in the secret places;
Who eat swine's flesh
And in whose vessels is broth of unclean things;
Who say "Keep by thyself
Do not touch me, else I sanctify thee."

In the same chapter we are told of those—

Who forsake Yahweh, who forget my holy mountain,
Who prepare a table for Gad,
And pour out mingled wine unto Meni—[65:11].

Gad was an old-time god in Canaan—witness the tribal name Gad, and the place-names Baal-gad (Josh. 11:17; 12:7; 13:5), and Migdal-gad (Josh. 15:37), as well as certain personal names in Hebrew, Phoenician, and Palmyrene. The god Meni is not otherwise clearly attested for Israel, being known elsewhere only in the pre-Mohammedan *Manat* of the Arabs (Sura 53:20) and *perhaps* in the tribal name Benjamin (= *בִּנְיָמִן*).¹ Cf. also the inscription on the altar at Vaison in Provence, "Belus Fortunae rector Menisque magister" ² Zech. 12:11 brings still another god to our attention in referring to "the mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the

¹ So Kerber, *Hebr. Eigennamen*, 67 ff.

² Mordtmann, *ZDMG*, 1885, pp. 44-46.

valley of Megiddo." In this connection we note the words of Sellin regarding his discoveries at Taanach which are in line with the biblical data: "In any case we see . . . that even the latest Israelitish stratum, although it no longer presented the customary Ashtarte figures, had not kept itself free from idolatry."¹

Not merely was the worship of other gods alongside of Yahweh common in Israel as far down as early post-exilic times,² so that the usage of the Elephantine colony is of a piece with that of the mother-country in this particular, but the association of Yahu with a female consort is not so foreign to Hebrew thought as we might at first feel. It is hardly likely that such association first came into existence in Egypt. We have already noted the long residence of Anath in Canaan before the Jewish migration to Egypt. It is improbable that the attachment of Yahweh for Anath was deferred until the late period represented by the Assuan colony. It is much more likely that this union was but a continuation of a state of affairs that had long existed in the home environment. This probability is increased by the consideration of certain additional facts. The women in Jer., chap. 44, when chided for worshipping the "queen of heaven," retort that their husbands indorse the practice, and that they had worshiped in this way in the old country and had prospered as long as they had done so. The "queen of heaven" may have been Anath, as Sachau and Eduard Meyer suggest; but in any case she was worshiped by people who at the same time were worshipers of Yahweh. That means that there was some sort of *modus vivendi* existing between Yahweh and the Queen—they were not regarded by their mutual worshipers as diametrically opposed one to the other, but rather as *allied* deities.

The excavations at Taanach and elsewhere have disclosed the fact that the most common images in the houses of Palestine from the earliest times down to the sixth or seventh century or thereabouts were the Astarte figures.³ This shows what a grip this concept of deity as feminine had upon the minds of the common people; and it is the religion of these people, not that of the great prophets, which

¹ *Tell Ta'anek*, p. 107.

² Cf. H. P. Smith, "Theophorous Proper Names, etc.," *AJSL*, XXIV, 34-61.

³ See Sellin, *Tell Ta'anek* (1904), pp. 105 f.; Vincent, *Canaan d'après l'exploration récente* (1907), pp. 158 f., 228.

we are here considering. The same thing is reflected in the frequent denunciations of the popular religion as adulterous in character, by the prophets in general and especially by Ezekiel. We have been too prone to treat such language as wholly figurative and as merely indicating the tendency on the part of Israel toward idolatry. But we must now suspect that in many more cases than we had supposed the prophets in using such language mean precisely what they say. It is the sort of thing represented by the *qadištu*, of Babylonia and Assyria, the counterpart of which we find in the קִדְּשָׁה and קִדְּשֵׁה of the Old Testament (Deut. 23:17, 18; I Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:47; II Kings 23:7; Gen. 38:21 f.; Hos. 4:14). We learn that these persons had their headquarters right alongside the temple of Yahweh (II Kings 23:7) in the days of Josiah, and that their practices were closely associated with or a part of the worship of the Asherah. The first mention of them is in the days of Rehoboam, showing that the practice was an old one which persisted up to the end of the Hebrew kingdom. Indeed we must carry it even farther back, for the testimony regarding the conduct of the sons of Eli (I Sam. 2:22) shows that the same type of cultus was connected with the shrine of Yahweh from the very beginning of his worship in Canaan. In this connection may be noted the association of lascivious rites with the worship of Aaron's calf, which was certainly intended to represent Yahweh (Exod. 32:6, 19, 25).

Indeed, that Yahweh should not have had a female deity as consort would be extraordinary in view of the popular conception of him in northern Israel. That conception was satisfied with the figure of Yahweh in the form of a bull (I Kings 12:28 f.; Hos. 8:5, 6; 10:5; 13:2). The idea of God thus expressed is certainly not above the association of Yahweh with a consort. Such association was practically inevitable. This is particularly true when it is borne in mind that the bull symbolism in Hebrew religion was by no means confined to the calf-worship at the northern shrines. Witness Egel-yo (the calf of Yahweh, or Yahweh is a calf) as the name of a man, which occurs on the ostraka from Samaria.¹ Then, too, it is altogether likely that the cherubim, overshadowing the ark with outstretched wings, were winged bulls like the bull-colossi of Babylonia

¹ Lyon, *Harvard Theological Review*, IV (1911), 141.

and Assyria. That brings the bull-symbolism right into the Holy of Holies (I Kings 8:6, 7). Furthermore, the great laver in the temple court rested upon the backs of twelve oxen (I Kings 7:25, 44), and figures of cherubim were carved freely upon the walls of Solomon's temple (I Kings 6:23-35; 7:29, 36). Ezekiel in his extraordinary attempt to represent Yahweh does not hesitate to make the bull figure one of the most conspicuous features of his representation.¹

If we bear in mind the repeated revisions through which the Old Testament literature has gone, the survival of even as much material of this character as that to which we have referred is a fact of great significance. To the last editors of the Old Testament, usages of this sort were an anathema. Hence nothing has survived except materials expressing disapprobation of these practices. But prophets and lawmakers did not waste time denouncing institutions and ideas that had no real existence. The very fact of the denunciation is the best evidence of the existence and prevalence of the practices. If we had unedited documents before us, we should almost certainly find that the religion of the masses in Palestine was to all intents and purposes of the same sort and on the same level as that of the Hebrew community on the Nile.

When we set the work of the prophets and sages of Israel against such a dark background as is suggested by the foregoing facts, we get a new appreciation of their greatness. They were spiritual giants. Their work was nothing less than creative in character. They fought against overwhelming odds and won. They lifted their countrymen from the low level of a crass and sensual polytheism to the exalted heights of ethical monotheism, and made them the religious teachers of the world.²

¹ For a suggestive discussion of the practice of bull-worship among the Hebrews, see an article by Leroy Waterman in this *Journal*, XXXI (1915), 229-55.

² An excellent English translation of the papyri by Dr. Martin Sprengling will appear in the *American Journal of Theology*, beginning in the July issue.